

UDC 327(73+510)

## CHINESE-IRANIAN RELATIONSHIPS UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE US: LIMITED COOPERATION AND LIMITED ABANDONMENT (1979–PRESENT)

*Maziar Mozaffari Falarti*

PhD (Political Science), Associate Professor

Faculty of World Studies

University of Tehran

North Campus of University of Tehran, North Kargar Ave, Tehran, 14155-6468, Iran

[mmfalarti@ut.ac.ir](mailto:mmfalarti@ut.ac.ir)

ORCID: 0000-0001-5305-8589

*Behzad Abdollahpour*

M.A. (Contemporary China Studies)

Renmin University of China

59, Zhongguancun St., Haidian District, Beijing, 100872, China

[b.abdollahpour@ruc.edu.cn](mailto:b.abdollahpour@ruc.edu.cn)

ORCID: 0000-0002-8004-1878

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to maintain profound economic and political relations with the People's Republic of China. In the interim since the 1970s China has not only enjoyed diplomatic and economic relations with the US but has become its largest trading partner. Having diplomatic relations with both Washington and Tehran, as well as being a permanent member of the United Nation's Security Council the government of China has openly served a constructive role, for all its own purpose and intentions, in attempting to bring Iran and the United States (such as in the case of the 2015 nuclear negotiations or JCPOA) back to the negotiation table. The 2015 nuclear agreement in particular was important as it potentially offered both Iran and the United States with a diplomatic opportunity and a platform to de-escalate their tensions, differences, and hostilities. The agreement also meant getting rid of most sanctions and barriers in doing business openly with Iran and hence the opening of the lucrative Iranian market to the Chinese, amongst other international players. Therefore, we have witnessed triangular relations between these three states which have influenced their political, economic, and diplomatic ambitions. This article examines the US factor in China and Iran relations in order to highlight China's dual policies towards Washington and Tehran. It concluded that the US factor compels the Chinese side to pursue a dual policy towards Iran which revolves around limited cooperation and limited abandonment. At the same time, Beijing tends to tilt toward Tehran in order to send Washington a message that China would not tolerate unilateralism.

**Keywords:** Iran; China; US; Cooperation; sanctions; Chinese-US relations; Chinese-Iranian relations

### 1. Introduction

Chinese-Iranian relations have witnessed close economic, cultural, and political cooperation throughout history. The origin of these amicable relations traced back to the inception of the Silk Road which has been considered their joint legacy. These deeply

---

© 2023 M. M. Falarti and B. Abdollahpour; Published by the A. Yu. Krymskyi Institute of Oriental Studies, NAS of Ukraine on behalf of *The World of the Orient*. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

rooted relations with China are free from the shackles of history which complicate Tehran's relations with former colonial great powers including the US, Great Britain, and Russia. Over the history of Iran and China, they not only have the same feelings of being subjected to the humiliating experience of colonialism but also have shared "a sense of systematic exclusion from the regional or global power politics by the great powers", which indicates the significance of victim mentality in the rhetoric of each country's leadership [U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2006]. Yet it is noteworthy that Iran and China's interests vis-à-vis the US differ significantly even if they share common rhetoric regarding US hegemony. While Beijing needs to maintain its ties with Washington due to its own economic growth, Tehran has not any formal and diplomatic ties with Washington [Harold and Nader 2012].

Despite the existence of such clichéd expressions and similarities, the US factor has been a constantly recurring issue in Chinese-Iranian relations which has affected their collaborations in political, military, and economic spheres. Although both Iran and China are revolutionary states, they have different worldviews and perceptions of international politics. While the Chinese came to this realization that in order to survive and make progress in the international system they should have second thoughts on their revolutionary ideology and establish relations with the great powers, Iranians have maintained the commitment to their revolutionary precepts which have stressed self-reliance policy and anti-Western tendencies. Indeed, by looking at history, we realized that Chinese leaders took their lessons from centuries of humiliation and sought to consolidate the military and economic powers of China in order to ordain the future of worlds of politics and economy. But contemporary Iranians take the difficult path of resisting the great powers which play significant roles in shaping the current international system. Therefore, Iran and China's relations have been fraught with contradictions in terms of collaboration and forming alliances. China is reluctant to sacrifice its deep economic relations with the US and its Middle-Eastern states particularly Saudi Arabia, Israel, and UAE. Although China has been successful at creating a balance between Tehran and Middle-Eastern countries, it was faced with serious difficulties in balancing Iran policy and US policy.

As this article will argue, Iran's nuclear issue can be seen as a turning point in Chinese-Iranian relationships in which China played a significant role during the negotiations between Tehran and its Western counterparts. In fact, from 2013 till 2015 China turned out as a responsible state by convincing the Iranian side that reaching an agreement would be to their benefit. For China, such a deal between Iran and the West was beneficial as it would ease the pressures from the Western countries in expanding economic ties with Tehran. For Iran, the deal could greatly reduce the intensity of the sanctions, save its devastating economy and normalize its relations with the West, which would enable Tehran to have more options in expanding its collaboration in economic, energy, and technological sections. In this context, some observers try to identify common patterns that could influence China, Iran, and US foreign policies. In 2014 Samir Tata, foreign policy analyst, and the staff assistant to US Senator, Dianne Feinstein, highlighted the potential emergence of strategic dynamics between China, Iran, and the US in which energy security, ending sanctions, and containing China's global rise were the policies pursued by Beijing, Tehran, and Washington respectively [Tata 2014]. Depicting a sanguine atmosphere of Iran and US détente, he believed that the US could encourage Iran to cut its oil export to China in an attempt to counter Beijing's growing influence in East Asia and beyond [Tata 2014]. With that said, this study seeks to shed light on China, Iran, and US triangular relations in order to explain the effects of the US factor on Iran and China's trajectory since the establishment of their first diplomatic ties. The authors believe that China has sought to strike a balance between its US and Iran policies in order to secure its long-term and short-term benefits. Therefore, Beijing has no choice but to pursue dual policies towards Washington and Tehran.

Considering China's balancing strategy with Iran and the US in a historical context, this paper explores how Beijing has gone about managing relations with both Tehran and Washington and to what extent the US factor could affect Chinese-Iranian relations. To achieve this, numerous incidents in Iran and China's bilateral relations and the role of the US in shaping their foreign policies are first outlined. This section constitutes a great part of the paper which not only shapes the understanding of readers regarding the similarities and differences Iran and China share in their approaches towards Washington but also highlighted the nuances of US factors in their foreign policies. Subsequently, the strategic and economic motivations that draw Iran and China closer to each other are addressed. Accordingly, the paper assesses China's dual policy which seeks to balance the relations between Iran and the US. In other words, it seems that the US factor is a bone of contention in Chinese-Iranian relations which compels the Chinese side to pursue a dual policy towards Iran which revolves around limited cooperation and limited abandonment. At the same time, Beijing tends to tilt toward Tehran in order to send Washington the message that China would not tolerate unilateralism.

## **2. Materials and methods**

In order to assess the US factors in Chinese-Iranian relations and China's Iran policy and US policy, the authors implement a qualitative research which enables us to describe and interpret triangular relations between China, Iran and the US. The data used in this study comes from policy documents from the Chinese, Iranian and US governments, a full range of books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, websites, speeches, and newsletters relating to the topic under study. As with all method, qualitative methodology could have some limitations, but we believe that it is a suitable one which could help us to better understand the experiences and actions of the actors under study – China, Iran and the US.

## **3. Theoretical framework**

The article will address soft-balancing framework to explain the US factor in Chinese-Iranian relations and China's dual policy towards Iran. As Pape mentioned, soft balancing strategy is the use of “non-military tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral U.S. military policies” and it usually resorts to “international institutions, economic statecraft, and diplomatic arrangements” to realize its goals [Pape 2005]. The most striking factors of this strategy are constraining the threats while “avoiding hard balancing, buck passing or bandwagoning” [Saltzman 2012]. In this respect Stephan Gill notes that China intends to fulfill two goals through its soft balancing strategy. On the one hand, it focuses on “the promotion of multilateral institutions that exclude the US” and on the other hand, it seeks to strengthen “bilateral relations with countries that either currently have weak ties to the US or are perceived by China to have the potential or desire to distance themselves from US influence” [Gill 2010].

By taking into consideration these aspects of soft balancing, the relationship between China and Iran will be drawn so as to comprehend Beijing's dual policy towards Tehran. Being cognizant of the issue that a direct confrontation with the US would be too costly and risky, and at the same time the significance of Iran as a geostrategic balance against the US, Chinese decision-makers pursue a third option to balance its ties with both Washington and Tehran. Therefore, China directly and indirectly violates US sanctions against Iran to make them abortive and costly for Washington and thereby preventing any potential military confrontation in the region of the Middle East which would desperately jeopardize China's economic and strategic interests in the region. Furthermore, Chinese do not usually support sanctions regime which could weaken a country and potentially contributes to a regime change, as we witnessed in the case of Iraq of Saddam Hossein. But sometimes in order to safeguard its own interests and maintaining its ties with the US in particular and the West in general, China has not directly stand against them. A prime

example was Iran's nuclear deal in which China played a significant role as a mediator between Tehran and the West. Focusing on diplomatic arrangements and cooperating with the US and its allies in international communities to ease international sanctions against Iran, China facilitated conclusion of Iran's nuclear deal (JCPOA) in 2015. Therefore, the strategy discussed here could better explain the triangular relations between China, Iran and the US which will be further investigated below against the backdrop of various historical incidents and cases.

#### **4. Balancing between Tehran and Washington**

##### **4.1. Seesaw relationships: 1949–1978**

Iran-China relations within these periods were influenced by the Cold War atmosphere. While Iran under Mohammad Reza Pahlavi – which was in the anti-communist Western bloc – considered China as an “expansionist, aggressive, and subversive Communist state”, China looked at Iran as a “mercenary of imperialism” [Shariatinia 2011]. Therefore, Iran's relations with China under Pahlavi's reign were of little significance, possibly due to US pressure on Tehran to keep its diplomatic and economic ties with Beijing at a minimum level. However, before his overthrow, Mohamad Reza Pahlavi sought to expand cooperation with China to have a more independent foreign policy and to counter Soviet Union's influence in Central, South, Southeast, and East Asian regions [Harold and Nader 2012]. During US-China's rapprochement in the early 1970s, Iran-China relations underwent a dramatic transformation. Ashraf Pahlavi, the influential twin sister of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had the first official visit to Beijing in April 1971 which paved the way for further cooperation and trust building between the two countries [Shariatinia 2011].

##### **4.2. Increasing collaboration between Iran and China: 1979–2013**

The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 coincided with the normalization of US-China relations which ushered in fundamental changes in the foreign policies of the two countries. While the new Iranian government ended the pro-Western policy, cut diplomatic relations with the US, and “adopted a revolutionary outlook in its foreign policy” based on the motto of “Neither East, Nor West” [Shariatinia 2011], Chinese leaders sought to expand their ties with the US. However, the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988) moved Chinese-Iranian relations into a new phase. In 1985, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, then Speaker of Iran's Parliament visited China to negotiate about buying military weapons. In his memoir, Rafsanjani said that “We met Deng Xiaoping..., and our negotiation lasted for an hour. He did not make any clear promise to sell military equipment to us” [Hashemi Rafsanjani 1985]. Yet as Rafsanjani mentioned Chinese finally agree with “the urgency of the delivery of these missiles to Iran” which was discussed in a private meeting with Mr. Zhao Zhyang, the Chinese Premier [Hashemi Rafsanjani 1985]. Moreover, after the Tiananmen Square incident in China, US isolated Beijing and pushed it into the arms of another isolated country – Iran, which encouraged both of them to deepen their collaboration in military and energy spheres more than before [Harold and Nader 2012].

By 1991, when Iran focused on reconstruction after 8 years of war, its trade with China had doubled, and till 2001 the average annual growth of trade increased by 55 percent [Dorraj and Blanchard 2021]. In addition, the ending of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century changed the security environment for both China and Iran. These developments also highlighted the US Middle East strategy in which Iran and Iraq were the main actors that determined the future strategic interests of Washington in the region. Hence, Chinese observers were concerned about US dual containment towards Iran and Iraq in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and maintained that after the demise of the Soviet Union, we witnessed an extremely unbalanced system in which the US wanted to exploit the situation and increased its dominance in the region



and control of the Persian Gulf oil [Garver 2011]. To this line of thought, since Iran is the only country in the Middle East that has not any formal relationship with US, Chinese-Iranian coalition in the region would be more in line with Chinese national interests that would serve as a geostrategic balance against US [Harold and Nader 2012]. Furthermore, the Chinese are very eager to maintain close relations with Iran, on the one hand, due to the belief that Iran supports China's rise in the international system [Harold and Nader 2012], and on the other hand, Beijing's growing ties with Tehran could serve as a hedge to keep Iran from falling into US orbit, especially if the current government in Iran is replaced with a pro-Washington government in the future [Wang and Xia 2010]. During Mohammad Khatami – former president of Iran from 1997 to 2005 – Iran and China deepened their political, economic, and security ties, as evidenced by Khatami's policy agendas such as establishing peaceful relations with the regional countries, creating stability in the Middle East, integrating into worlds of politics and economy and containing US influence in West Asia [Alam 2000], which dovetailed nicely with the Chinese national interests as mentioned before. However, China has gone to great lengths to avoid choosing sides which could lead to serious conflict between the US and Iran and take both sides to the brink of war and thereby threatening the stability and security established by the US for such a long time in the volatile region of the Middle East. Therefore, Chinese observers recommend policymakers that “using the positive factors present in the US-Iran conflict to expand [our] international influence is [China's] wisest choice” [Xue and et al 2011].

Notwithstanding Chinese concern about any potential head-on confrontation between Iran and the US in the Persian Gulf, which could lead to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz – an important route for importing oil from the Middle Eastern countries, some Chinese analysts maintain that the confrontation between Iran and US in the Middle East would not be bad for China. Since in that case, the US would focus its complete energy and attention on the Middle East which impeded Washington from containing the growth of China in Asia and beyond and paved the way for Beijing to appear as the true superpower [Harold and Nader 2012]. These observers were inspired by prominent Chinese foreign policy analyst Wang Jisi, dean of the Peking University School of International Studies who pointed out that the US war with Iraq benefited Beijing, since “it is beneficial for our external environment to have the United States militarily and diplomatically deeply sunk in the Mideast to the extent that it can hardly extricate itself” [Tkacik 2007]. In this vein, Renmin University professor Shi Yinhong argued that “Washington's deeper involvement in the Middle East is favorable to Beijing, reducing Washington's ability to place focused attention and pressure on China” [Shi 2011].

The cooperative ties were at their zenith during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's administration by proposing “Look to the East Policy” in 2005. Prioritizing this new orientation in Iran's foreign policy, Ahmadinejad sought to expand Iran's relations with Russia and Asian countries. At that time, among the Asian countries, China had the most comprehensive relations with Iran. Ahmadinejad believed that Iran did not need to lean towards the West, and through SCO, a security organization led by China and Russia, Iran could counter US presence in the region and escape the isolation in the international community [Akbarzadeh 2015]. In fact, the reason behind Iran's tendencies towards Asian countries specifically China lay in its dissatisfaction with the US-led world order. As mentioned before, after the demise of the Soviet Union, Iranian foreign policy and its relations with other countries were affected greatly. Iranian authorities were cognizant of the so-called US victory in the cold war and its ambition of shaping a US-led world order, which did not augur well for Tehran due to the existence of its deep hostility toward the US, especially after the 1980–1981 hostage crisis. Therefore, in order to challenge this new order, Iran had to lean towards some actors with whom it shared common similarities regarding the dissatisfaction with US unilateralism in the international system [Hunter 2010]. China

for its part also embraced Iran's "anti-imperialist" stance and called for a multipolar world which was consistent with Beijing's own policy of resisting hegemony and unilateralism [Dorraj and Blanchard 2021]. Therefore, we witnessed the growing cooperation between Iran and China both in the energy and military spheres. For instance, during Ahmadinejad's first presidential tenure – between 2005 and 2009 – according to the Stockholm Institute for International Peace Studies (SIPRI), after Pakistan, Iran was the second arms importer from China [Swaine 2010].

The economic growth between the two countries during these periods was associated with two factors. On the one hand, in the early 2000s, following US pressures on Iran's major customers, including Russia, Japan, South Korea, India, and Europe, to reduce their trade activities in Iran, due to its nuclear program, Chinese took the opportunity and increased their presence in Iran's domestic market and energy fields [Harold and Nader 2012]. On the other hand, under the new leadership of Hu Jintao, China not only pursued an economic policy of "going out strategy" which focused on increasing investment in global energy but also "de-emphasized the relatively warmer relations with the United States and the West that had characterized the Jiang Zemin years in favor of emphasizing such goals as internal stability and social harmony" [Harold and Nader 2012].

#### **4.3. More cooperation against the backdrop of JCPOA: 2014–2021**

After Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who pursued a more pro-China foreign policy, Hassan Rouhani, a pragmatic and pro-Western president, assumed power in Iran. The majority of his cabinet, including him, was educated in Western countries. Therefore, his administration sought to maintain cordial relations with China and expand ties with Western countries to decrease Iran's international isolation and lessen its dependency on China as well. However, Rouhani considered China as an important economic and energy partner, which could pave the way for his administration to "privatize the economy and integrate it more closely into the global system" [Scobel & Nader 2016]. Considering China's New Silk Road initiative and SCO as the economic and geopolitical avenues of collaboration, the Rouhani administration asked for further cooperation with China [Scobel & Nader 2016].

The conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) under the Rouhani administration in 2015 which resolved Iran's nuclear issue was a turning point in the history of Iran's relations with the West and paved the way for rejoining the global economy. Obviously, Chinese-Iranian relations were affected by JCPOA which created a favorable atmosphere for doing business. Furthermore, the Iranians didn't forget the Chinese significant role during the sanctions periods and their efforts in facilitating the talks between the West and Tehran. Before signing JCPOA Chinese diplomats and political scholars affiliated with the government had several unofficial and secret visits to Tehran to meet Iranian authorities and decision-makers in order to convince Iranians that resolving the nuclear deal through diplomatic channels would be to their benefit. For instance, in November 2014, during a meeting between some Chinese scholars from the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations Studies (CICIR), a leading Chinese think tank and the scholars and observers of the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS), an important Iranian think tanks affiliated with Presidential Office of Iran, the Chinese side pointed out that Chinese-Iranian ties could elevate to strategic levels on the condition that the international barriers against Iran were removed, and Iran's nuclear issue was solved [Center for Strategic Studies 2014]. Iranian side also acknowledged the adverse influence of the US factor in the bilateral relations between Iran and China, and the issue that China tended to approach the US more cautiously and Anti-Americanism had no place in the foreign policy priorities of Beijing [Center for Strategic Studies 2014].

Signing Iran's nuclear deal and the lifting of sanctions would bode well for Chinese-Iranian collaboration in economic and military spheres. Therefore, it was not surprising that President Xi Jinping made an important visit to Tehran in 2016 – making him the first Chinese leader to do so since Jiang Zemin in 2002 – and had a meeting with Iranian

authorities including Ayatollah Khamenei to solidify Chinese-Iranian ties. Since then, there wasn't any official document between the two sides that could serve as the roadmap for their future and long-term collaboration. Therefore, during the meeting with the Iranian side, seventeen MOUs were signed which officially facilitated the way for Iran to join BRI. China and Iran also decided to elevate their ties to the level of "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" [Forough 2021]. Furthermore, hoping for a future explosion in trade, the two countries pledged to increase their trade to \$600 billion by 2026 [Motevalli 2016].

Depicting a pragmatic picture of JCPOA, Shannon Tiezzi argued that JCPOA was "a double-edged sword for China-Iran relations", which on the one hand facilitated Chinese-Iranian cooperation in economic and military spheres, on the other hand, much to Chinese chagrin, it encouraged other European companies to come to Iran and increased their influence in Iranian markets which were almost dominated by Chinese companies since Ahmadinejad's presidency [Tiezzi 2016].

However, the Trump administration's unilateral withdrawal from JCPOA and its subsequent imposition of sanctions affected Chinese-Iranian relations adversely. To make the matters worse, after the arrest of Meng Wanzhou (孟晚舟), Huawei's Chief Financial Officer, in December 2018 due to the alleged violation of US sanctions against Iran, Kunlun "the state-owned bank at the heart of China's trade with Iran, announced a dramatic change in its policies", informed that "it would no longer process payments that contravened US secondary sanctions on Iran" [Motamedi 2019]. US unilateral sanctions also cast a shadow on Iran and China's deep collaborations in the oil area. In 2014, Iran was among the first six largest oil suppliers of China (Statista, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2015), however, by 2020 "China's official oil imports from Iran had decreased 94 percent, while imports from Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE increased by 651 percent, 18 percent, and 8 percent, respectively" [Green and Roth 2021]. Although according to the official statistics Iran was no longer among the top ten oil suppliers of China [Zhou 2021], the research conducted by Refinitiv suggested that total Chinese imports of Iranian oil, including illicit or "unofficial" imports, reached 3.75 million tons in March 2021 which was significantly above official figures [Nikkei 2021]. Therefore, it makes sense why we have witnessed a downward trend in Iran and China's total trade volume till now.

The Trump administration's harsh stance towards Beijing and Tehran had serious repercussions for US foreign policies in general and Chinese-Iranian ties in particular. Trump's transactional, complicated and capricious foreign policy and his insistence on maximum pressure in dealing with China and Iran would not only lead to the resistance of these countries against US unilateralism but also push Tehran and Beijing closer together. The Trump Administration's National Security Strategies released in 2017, depicted Iran as a serious threat and China as a "revisionist power" that sought to threaten and challenge US interests in political, economic, and military spheres [Cordesman 2017]. In 2018, Trump waged a trade war with China by signing a Presidential Memorandum and imposing some tariffs on Chinese products [The White House 2018]. His paradoxical China policy was taking Chinese-US relations in a new direction, the results of which fuel the mistrust between them. Some scholars consider this policy shift as "a more open embrace of conflict and competition" [Economy 2019]. Similarly his Iran policy was a disaster due to his dangerous measures that could take two countries to the brink of war. In January 2020, US forces assassinated top Iranian general, Qasem Soleimani which not only resumed bitter hostilities between Tehran and Washington – which was ceased to some extent before Trump's withdrawal from JCPOA – but also was followed by a retaliatory missile attacks on two coalition bases in Iraq that injured several American military forces.

Another important incident under the Rouhani administration was the finalization of the 25-year cooperation agreement – or as it is called Iran and China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) – which was initially proposed in 2016 during President Xi's

visit to Iran. While Western and regional countries expressed their deep concerns about such a kind of cooperation which could include military and security aspects, Chinese and Iranian sides highlighted the economic and cultural focuses of the agreement that would be of great benefit to both Iranian and Chinese peoples [Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Islamic Republic of Iran 2021]. Similarly, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian mentioned that the agreement "neither includes any quantitative, specific contracts and goals nor targets any third party, and will provide a general framework for China-Iran cooperation going forward" [Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Chicago 2021]. The agreement was signed after the controversial March 2021 US-China meeting in Alaska, which could indicate that China wanted to send this message that Beijing "has the capacity to work with U.S. adversaries to undermine U.S. influence in the region" [Green and Roth 2021]. It must be also noted that due to the Western-oriented foreign policy of Hassan Rouhani, he preferred focusing on JCPOA and expanding ties with Western countries rather than establishing a balanced relation with China by finalizing this agreement. And accordingly, after the US withdrawal from JCPOA, Iran had to consider the agreement suspended since 2016, in the hope that it could lessen the damaging effects of sanctions on its economy.

Indeed, after the failure of Hassan Rouhani's Western-oriented foreign policy, Iranian authorities approached the Chinese to deepen their economic and strategic collaboration, therefore, they were too optimistic about (CSP) and believed that this strategic partnership could be a game changer for both Tehran and Beijing that not only influence the regional but also global security architecture. In other words, for China, this strategic partnership could be a considerable step to expand from a regional hegemony to a world power via China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and for Iran, it could be an attempt to further increase its influence not only as a regional actor in the Middle East but also pave the way to shoulder significant role in the Indo-Pacific region [Saleh and Yazdanshenas 2020].

However, it should be taken into consideration that China has its own special framework of partnership in the world including the Middle East. The highest levels of partnership in the Middle East are "comprehensive strategic partnerships" that China established with some regional countries including Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Before President Xi came to Iran in 2016, he had traveled to Saudi Arabia to elevate the ties between the two countries to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. And in 2018 China and UAE established their ties to this level, and regarding Egypt, Cairo and Beijing had already established such a kind of partnership in 2014 [Green and Roth 2021]. In fact, Beijing seeks to pursue a balanced strategy towards regional countries and stay away from security disputes in the Middle East region, in order to "maximize its gains in the region without alienating any partners" [Houghton 2020].

#### ***4.4. Resurgence of Look to East Policy: 2021 – present***

After Hassan Rouhani, the pendulum of Iran's foreign policy leaned again towards the principlist leaders in Iran who are more pro-Asian rather than pro-Western in their attitudes. Although President Raisi mentioned that he would strike a balance between Iran's Western and Asian policies, his administration seems reluctant to trust the West in general and the US in particular after the incidents we had in the previous years under the Rouhani's administration ranging from the failure of JCPOA in realizing Iran's national security, harsh and unprecedented sanctions and assassinating the General Soleymani. Therefore, the "Look to East Policy" resumed under the Raisi Administration. In the political area, Iran could ultimately join SCO and took some significant steps to normalize its relations with regional states including Saudi Arabia. Moreover, Iran and the Western countries are currently negotiating over reviving JCPOA, all of which could be a positive signal for the future cooperation of Iran and China, although social unrest in Iran started during September 2022 and Tehran-Mosco's military collaboration during the Russia-Ukraine war began to undermine the future of JCPOA and Iran's ties with its allies,



particularly China. In this line of thought, as Xi Jinping began his third term “appears to be viewing relations with Iran through the prism of liability, rather than an opportunity” [Scita 2022]. During his meeting with the GCC countries, Xi used direct language regarding Iran’s regional activities and its obligations under JCPOA which “was less neutral than that typically seen in Chinese communiqués” [Scita 2022]. But that doesn’t mean that China would abandon Iran forever, considering the history and trend of relations between Beijing and Tehran. It must be noted that China’s consistent approaches to Middle Eastern countries revolve around not taking sides in political conflicts which could upset the security dynamics and stability in the region. Therefore, Chinese leaders have sought to maintain “largely positive and substantive relations with the region’s four major ethnic groups: Arabs, Persians, Turks, and Jews” [Chen 2011].

### **5. Iran’s significance for China**

Considering Iran’s energy reserves and its special geopolitical position in the region, Tehran could help Beijing to permanently secure its energy resources. For instance, by building Iran-Pakistan and Iran Turkmenistan pipelines China could realize that end [Ehteshami et al 2018]. Furthermore, Iran could be considered as a hedge against any US-led attempt in the region to cut off oil export to China in the case of the escalation of tensions between US and its like-minded allies in the Middle East [Committee on Foreign Affairs 2019]. Unlike China’s other oil suppliers in the region which have close security ties with the US, Iran does not have any relation with it. In this vein, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei said that “Iran is the most reliable country in the region for energy since its energy policies will never be affected by foreigners” [Reuters 2016a]. Besides Iran’s role in facilitating Chinese secure access to oil, Beijing would enjoy Iran’s raw materials as well as huge markets for Chinese productions. Furthermore, Iran’s long-lasting sanctions imposed by the US and its difficulty in having access to global trade bodies – which might be continued in the future due to the implacable hostility between Tehran and Washington – discourage most countries to establish safe economic relations. Therefore, China has been the last resort for Iran during sanctions periods, in which Beijing has benefited more from bartering Iranian energy for Chinese commodities [The Guardian 2013]. Pinning its hope on any change in Iran’s future relations with the West regarding its nuclear issue, China will maintain its relationships with Iran, since a “less aggressive Iran would be an important market and energy supplier, as well as an important regional power” [US-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2020]. Due to Iran’s geopolitical location, situated at the nexus of the Middle East, South, and Central Asia and along the Caspian Sea and Strait of Hormuz, it could also serve as a crucial node in the development of BRI.

### **6. China’s significance for Iran**

Considering that many Western countries have been worried about Chinese influence in the Middle East, Iran could use its collaborative ties with China as a bargaining chip in any negotiations with some Western and Eastern countries regarding sanctions and expanding China’s presence in the Middle East. Furthermore, China could protect Iran against international sanctions and avoid the isolation of Iran in the international community. In addition, Beijing could help to enhance “Iran’s political and military status in the region as a counterweight to the influence of the United States” [Zimmt et al 2017]. Jonathan Fulton, assistant professor of political science at Zayed University, provides us with a factional view of China. He argues that the two political factions in Iran have different attitudes toward China’s significance for Tehran. The first faction considers China as a vital economic lifeline that could help Iran during the sanctions periods and the second faction views “the CCP as sympathetic to Iranian ambitions to revise the current geopolitical order in the Middle East” [Green and Roth 2021]. In fact, in comparison with other great

powers, China has been the best choice to be Iran's strategic partner. As Dr. Alterman mentioned, "Iran is by far the weaker party in this bilateral relationship... Iran clearly needs China, but China has alternatives to Iran" [Committee on Foreign Affairs 2019]. But there is also a third faction in Iran's political system which is dubious about establishing deep relations with the Chinese due to the potential encroachment of Iranian sovereignty [Green and Roth 2021].

### **7. China's dual policy towards Iran**

A prime example of China's dual policy towards Iran could be evidenced by its ambiguous position in international organizations regarding Iran's nuclear issue. For instance, China mostly supported United Nations Security Council Resolutions against Iran before the signing of JCPOA, although sometimes sought to object to the draft of these resolutions which did not influence their implementations significantly. With that said, these questions arise why China pursued such an ambiguous stance? Why did it not veto those resolutions early on or later? We would answer these questions below.

Iran-US confrontation and Tehran's occasional antagonizing stances towards the West pose serious challenges and costly choices on Beijing. In addition, Iran issue has been one of the recurrent themes of Chinese-US negotiations and sometimes it could be used as a bargaining chip in their talks. For instance, before JCPOA, the existence of four developments during the late 1990s and early 2000s clearly indicated China's dual policy towards Iran against the backdrop of US-China relations. Firstly, following Jiang Zemin's consolidation of power in 1997 and his skillful management of Chinese-US relations, made him less worried about Beijing-Tehran relations and its influence on Beijing-Washington ties. However, US air-strike on China's embassy in Belgrade in 1999 compelled him to distance from US, and expanding cooperation with Iran could be "a popular way to show China's indifference to U.S. concerns" [Harold and Nader 2012]. In late 2001, due to China's accession to WTO, Beijing avoided using Iran leverage against US, since Washington previously threatened that it would block China's accession to this international body, if Beijing continued to cooperate with Tehran. And finally, after the discovery of Iran's secret nuclear uranium enrichment in 2002, Western companies withdrew from Iran and US and its allies increased pressure on Iran which paved the way for Chinese companies and diplomats to build economic and strategic relations with Tehran [Harold and Nader 2012].

Striking a balance between their economic cooperation with Tehran and not sacrificing their relations with the West in general and the US in particular, Chinese leaders have been facing a dilemma regarding their approaches towards Iran [Ehteshami et al 2018]. Therefore, China cautiously approaches Iran and seeks to adapt its Iran policy according to the dominant political atmosphere and its own vital interests. For instance, notwithstanding its rhetorical support of Iran with regard to membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), it declined Iran's accession to this organization in 2016, fearing that it could give SCO a more anti-western tone [Reuters 2016b].

In another example, considering that Iran's nuclear crisis could endanger Chinese-US relations, Beijing voted "yes" on all four UN Security Council resolutions – 1737 (in 2006), 1747 (in 2007), 1803 (in 2008), and 1929 (in 2010), however, China went to great length to minimize damage to its economic cooperation with Iran [Garver 2011]. For instance, Thomas Christensen, the former Deputy Assistance Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, mentioned that China accepted Resolution 1929 "only after watering them down to protect China's economic interests and to reduce damage to Iran's overall economy" [Almond 2016]. Being the major trade partner of Iran, having veto power in UNSC, and the only country that could challenge US primacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China could directly affect the effectiveness of sanctions [Izadi and Khodaei 2017]. At the same time, China is reluctant to risk its interests by standing directly against the

US for the sake of Iran. Washington has also expressed its deep concern about Chinese-Iranian proximity whether before JCPOA or after it within Chinese initiatives or any other cooperative frameworks including Iran and China's Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) signed recently. Therefore, Washington has to resort to some leverage and policy options to prevent Tehran and Beijing from approaching each other too closely which could jeopardize US interests. These include enhancing cooperation with China over issues which of great importance to Beijing, diplomatic pressures and sanctions which could directly influence the global image of China, reducing China's energy dependency on Iran by encouraging other producers to supply the energy needs of Beijing, and finally creating a global coalition of partners to compel China to work in tandem with them to impose sanctions on Iran. Under Xi Jinping, we can also find such a dual policy towards Iran, albeit with small changes. Although it seems that Beijing is reluctant to play the active role it had before to push Iran to cooperate with the P5+1 regarding the nuclear issue, still it supports Iran in the international forums and is usually opposed to any U.N. sanctions and IAEA resolution against Iran and its nuclear activities. At the same time, China has reduced its purchase of oil and constricts its economic ties with Iran to send this message that constant economic support and deepening bilateral ties depend on reviving JCPOA [Batmanghelidj 2022].

## **8. Conclusion**

Since the establishment of Iran and the People's Republic of China's first diplomatic ties in 1971, the US factor has been ubiquitous in their foreign policies and influenced their bilateral cooperation. US-China's enduring rivalry and Iran and US continuing hostility cast a shadow over Tehran and Beijing's bilateral relations. Considering the triangular relations of these three states with each other, we realize the existence of reactive foreign policies among these actors toward one another. The authors believe that there is a close relationship between China's Iran and US policies, which enables Beijing to evolve its foreign policies toward these countries to get concessions from both Tehran and Washington. As the US adopts maximum pressure on Iran and China, it would merely bring Beijing and Tehran closer to each other. At the same time, China sends some signals to Iran that their collaboration could be increased on the condition that Tehran tries to revive JCPOA and normalize its relations with the Western and regional countries.

Then there are other key factors, particularly political and internal dynamics, in each of these three nations that must be considered when dealing with their triangular relations and policies. In a recent 2022 article the authors argue that the US China policy and agreements on a number of issues (such as the Belt Road Initiative) are heavily influenced by the "realist" and "liberal" camps that dominate Washington's politics, decision making and foreign relations [Abdollahpour, Falarti and Izadi 2022]. With the "liberal camp" traditionally promoting ties between Beijing and Washington as a mean to contain and balance the rise of China; while the "realist camp" taking a more real politic approach towards China and unilaterally in developing a strong strategic and a more rigid response towards its global interests and influence. On Iran (and Russia) 2022 report conducted by a number of US and Europe based scholars similarly found a heavy handed, realistic and pragmatic approach by the Republican Party in the US (representing the more conservative "realist camp") towards it as opposed to the liberal party that traditionally has favored a more balanced approach and on compromise [Jahani, Gallagher et al 2022].

Analysis of the debate about the US factor in Chinese-US relations suggests that China's Iran policy has oscillated between limited cooperation and limited abandonment. In some cases, due to pressures put by the US and its like-minded partners with which China has deep relations, Beijing has to temporarily abandon Iran, in order not to endanger its own interests. Simultaneously, sometimes China tends to send Washington some signals that it would not tolerate US unilateralism. Some prime examples are as follows:

supporting rhetorically Tehran's stances regarding various issues in the international communities, offsetting US pressures against Iran, and buying Iranian crude oil against the sanctions – mostly in unofficial ways to bypass the sanctions. In fact, during the sanctions periods, the Chinese tended to be Iran's only customer specifically in the energy sector.

To end with, the authors anticipate that we would witness such a multifarious pattern in the future relations of China with the US and Iran unless Tehran and Washington normalize their relations which have much depended on the future of JCPOA. More recent socio-political, economic and diplomatic developments in the region and beyond (including the Russia-Ukraine war) particularly the diplomatic role of China as the 'peace maker' in the Middle East (such as the case of Iran-Saudi relations) are also important areas that are currently defining the extent and future of Iran-China relations in a global and domestic role. Nonetheless, since the Biden administration assumed power in 2021, all the eyes are on Iran and the US to revive this deal, but it seems that like the previous Donald Trump's (2017–2021) Republican Party's administration, Biden resorts to maximum pressure to bring Iran to the negotiation table which would merely complicate Iran and US relations and escalate the tensions in the region and beyond. Indeed the approach and political stance by Biden and his "liberal camp" administration towards Iran and China (as well as the wider foreign policy) seems to be an updated and a more conservative development in which certainly is realigning itself to the previous Trump era policies and the "republican camp".

#### REFERENCES

- Akbarzadeh Sh. (2015), "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Ideology and Realpolitik in Iranian Foreign Policy", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 69, Issue 1, pp. 88–103. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2014.934195>
- Alam Sh. (2000), "The changing paradigm of Iranian foreign policy under Khatami", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 24, Issue 9, pp. 1629–1653. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700160008455310>
- Almond R. G. (2016), "China and the Iran Nuclear Deal", *The Diplomat*, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2016/03/china-and-the-iran-nuclear-deal> (accessed February 12, 2023).
- Batmanghelidj E. (2022), "Shared interests: Why both China and the West support the Iran nuclear deal", in *European Council on Foreign Relations*, available at: <https://ecfr.eu/article/shared-interests-why-both-china-and-the-west-support-the-iran-nuclear-deal> (accessed February 23, 2023).
- Abdollahpour B., Falarti M. M. and Izadi F. (2022), "China's Belt and Road initiative amid Obama's negligence and Trump's pessimism", *Shidnij svit*, No. 3, pp. 138–159. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15407/orientw2022.03.138>
- Chen J. (2011), "The Emergence of China in the Middle East", in *Strategic Forum*, Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS), Washington, DC, available at: <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratforum/SF-271.pdf> (accessed January 24, 2023).
- Committee on Foreign Affairs* (2019), "Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa and International Terrorism: Chinese and Russian Influence in the Middle East", available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-116hhrg36424/pdf/CHRG-116hhrg36424.pdf> (accessed March 20, 2022).
- Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Chicago* (2021), "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on March 29", available at: [http://chicago.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/fyrth/202103/t20210329\\_8993019.htm](http://chicago.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/fyrth/202103/t20210329_8993019.htm) (accessed July 17, 2022).
- Cordesman A. H. (2017), "President Trump's New National Security Strategy", in *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/president-trumps-national-security-strategy> (accessed October 2, 2022).
- Dorraj M. and Blanchard J. F. (2021), "Iran in China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI): Bounded Progress and Bounded Promise", in Jean-Marc F. Blanchard (ed.), *China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative, Africa, and the Middle East: Feats, Freezes, and Failures*, Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore.
- Economy E. C. (2019), "US-China Relations at 40", *The Diplomat*, January 01, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2018/12/us-china-relations-at-40> (accessed November 21, 2022).



- Ehteshami A., Horesh N. and Xu R (2018), “Chinese-Iranian Mutual Strategic Perceptions”, *The China Journal*, Vol. 79, pp. 1–20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/693315>
- Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (2021), “Ambassador Chang Hua Gives Joint Interview to Tehran Times and Mehr News Agency”, available at: [http://ir.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/sgzc/202105/t20210519\\_8924222.htm](http://ir.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/sgzc/202105/t20210519_8924222.htm) (accessed August 28, 2022).
- Forough M. B. (2021), “Iran between the US and China”, in *Ankara: Center for Iranian Studies (IRAM)*, available at: [https://iramcenter.org/d\\_hbanaliz/Iran\\_between\\_the\\_US\\_and\\_China.pdf](https://iramcenter.org/d_hbanaliz/Iran_between_the_US_and_China.pdf) (accessed July 11, 2022).
- Fulton J. (2020), “U.S.-China Relations in 2020: Enduring Problems and Emerging Challenges”, in *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, available at: [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/Fulton\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/Fulton_Testimony.pdf) (accessed June 13, 2022).
- Garver J. W. (2011), “Is China Playing a Dual Game in Iran?”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, Issue 1, pp. 75–88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2011.538296>
- Gill S. (2010), “China’s Soft Balancing Strategy and the Role of Resource Investment”, *Yonsei Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, pp. 247–58, available at: <https://yonseijournal.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/china-soft-balancing.pdf> (accessed September 29, 2022).
- Green W. and Roth T. (2021), “China-Iran Relations: A Limited but Enduring Strategic Partnership”, in *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, available at: [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/China-Iran\\_Relations.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/China-Iran_Relations.pdf) (accessed November 28, 2022).
- Harold S. W. and Nader A. R. (2012), “China and Iran: Economic, Political, and Military Relations”, in *RAND Corporation*, available at: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional\\_papers/OP351.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP351.html) (accessed June 25, 2022).
- Houghton B. (2022), “China’s Balancing Strategy Between Saudi Arabia and Iran: The View from Riyadh”, *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 53, Issue 1, pp. 124–144. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2022.2029065>
- Hunter Sh. (2010), *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order*, Praeger, Santa Barbara.
- Izadi F. and Khodae E. (2017), “The Iran Factor in U.S.-China Relations: Guarded Engagement vs. Soft Balancing”, *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, Vol. 3, Issue. 2, pp. 299–323. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2377740017500105>
- Jahani E., Gallagher N., Merhout F. et al. (2022), “An Online experiment during the 2020 US–Iran crisis shows that exposure to common enemies can increase political polarization”, *Sci Rep*, Vol. 12, 19304. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-23673-0>
- Motamedi M. (2019), “Policy Change at China’s Bank of Kunlun Cuts Iran Sanctions Lifeline”, in *Bourse & Bazaar Foundation*, January 2, available at: <https://www.bourseandbazaar.com/articles/2019/1/2/policy-change-at-chinas-bank-of-kunlun-cuts-sanctions-lifeline-for-iranian-industry> (accessed July 10, 2022).
- Motevalli G. (2016), “China, Iran Agree to Expand Trade to \$600 Billion in a Decade”, *Bloomberg*, available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-01-23/china-iran-agree-to-expand-trade-to-600-billion-in-a-decade> (accessed September 14, 2022).
- Nikkei* (2021), “China’s Oil Imports from Iran Hit New High, Curbing OPEC Options”, available at: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Markets/Commodities/China-s-oil-imports-from-Iran-hit-new-high-curbing-OPEC-options> (accessed August 4, 2022).
- Pape R. A. (2005), “Soft Balancing against the United States”, *International Security*, Vol. 30, Issue 1, pp. 7–45.
- Rafsanjani A. H. (1985), *Majmoueh Khateraateh Rouzaneh: Omid va delvapas*, Nash-re Ma’aref Enghelab, Tehran. (In Farsi).
- Center for Strategic Studies* (2014), “Ghozaresh Mozakerate Hei’Ate Ezami Az Mo’assesseh Motale’aate Ravabete Beyn-al- melale Mo’asere Chin Ba Masoolan Va Moshaverane Markaze Barrasi haye Estratejike Riyasat Jomhuri”, available at: <http://css.ir/Media/PDF/1400/01/25/637539947436608466.pdf> (accessed June 12, 2022). (In Farsi).
- Reuters* (2016a), “China-Led Bloc Keeps Iran at Arm’s Length despite Russian Backing”, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-uzbekistan-sco-idUSKCN0Z9213> (accessed February 8, 2023).
- Reuters* (2016b), “Khamenei Calls for Security Cooperation with China, Says U.S. Not to Be Trusted”, January 23, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/iran-china-khamenei-idINL8-N1570HR> (accessed June 19, 2022).

Saleh A. and Yazdanshenas Z. (2020), “Iran’s Pact With China Is Bad News for the West”, *Foreign Policy*, August 9, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/09/irans-pact-with-china-is-bad-news-for-the-west> (accessed October 15, 2022).

Saltzman I. Z. (2012), “Soft Balancing as Foreign Policy: Assessing American Strategy toward Japan in the Interwar Period”, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 131–150. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2011.00146.x>

Scita J. (2022), “When it Comes to Iran, China is Shifting the Balance”, in *Bourse & Bazaar Foundation*, December 13, available at: <https://www.bourseandbazaar.com/articles/2022/12/13/when-it-comes-to-iran-china-is-shifting-the-balance> (accessed March 10, 2023).

Scobell A. and Nader A. R. (2016), “China in the Middle East: The Wary Dragon”, in *RAND Corporation*, available at: [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1200/RR1229/RAND\\_RR1229.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1200/RR1229/RAND_RR1229.pdf) (accessed April 19, 2022).

Shariatinia M. (2011), “Iran-China Relations: An Overview of Critical Factors”, *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 1, Issue. 4, pp. 57–85.

Shi Y. (2011), “How the Middle East’s Uprisings Affect China’s Foreign Relations?”, in *East Asia Forum*, May 17, available at: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2011/05/17/how-the-middle-east-s-uprisings-affect-china-s-foreign-relations> (accessed June 16, 2022).

Statista (2015), “Breakdown of China’s Crude Oil Imports in 2014, by Source Country”, May 14, available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/221765/chinese-oil-imports-by-country> (accessed April 7, 2022).

Swaine M. D. (2010), “Beijing’s Tightrope Walk on Iran”, in *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 28, available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CLM33MS.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2022).

Tata S. (2014), “US, Iran and China: An Emerging Strategic Triangle”, *International Relations and Security Network (ISN)*, Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, Switzerland, January 30, available at: [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/188209/ISN\\_176024\\_en.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/188209/ISN_176024_en.pdf) (accessed May 11, 2022).

*The Guardian* (2013), “China Floods Iran with Cheap Consumer Goods in Exchange for Oil”, February 20, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2013/feb/20/china-floods-iran-cheap-consumer-goods> (accessed June 12, 2022).

*The White House* (2018), “Presidential Memorandum Targeting China’s Economic Aggression”, March 22, available at: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-signing-presidential-memorandum-targeting-chinas-economic-aggression> (accessed September 30, 2022).

Tiezzi Sh. (2016), “Why China’s President Is Heading to Iran”, *The Diplomat*, January 19, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2016/01/why-chinas-president-is-heading-to-iran> (accessed April 10, 2022).

Tkacik J. J. (2007), “The Arsenal of the Iraq Insurgency: It’s Made in China”, in *The Heritage Foundation*, August 7, available at: <https://www.heritage.org/defense/commentary/the-arsenal-the-iraq-insurgency-its-made-china> (accessed April 10, 2022).

*U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission* (2006), “China’s Proliferation to North Korea and Iran, and Its Role in Addressing the Nuclear and Missile Situations in Both Nations”, September 14, available at: <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/transcripts/9.14.06HearingTranscript.pdf> (accessed July 14, 2022).

Wang L. and Shi X. (2010), *Hé ānquán bèijīng xià de yīlǎng hé wèntí yǔ zhōngguó wàijiāo zhànlüè xuǎnzé*, Leadership Science. (In Chinese).

Xue J., Yang X. and Liang Y. (2011), “Zhōngguó——yīlǎng shíyóu màoyì fēngxiǎn yǔ yìngduì”, *Practice in Foreign Economic Relations and Trade*, Issue 1, pp. 27–29, [https://info.cqvip.com/Qikan/Article/Detail?id=36367995&from=Qikan\\_Article\\_Detail](https://info.cqvip.com/Qikan/Article/Detail?id=36367995&from=Qikan_Article_Detail) (accessed January 10, 2023). (In Chinese).

Zhou O. (2021), “China’s 2020 Crude Imports from US Surge 211% to 396,000 b/d, Valued at \$6.28 Bil”, in *S&P Global Platts*, January 20, available at: <https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/oil/012021-china-data-2020-crude-imports-from-us-surge-211-to-396000-bd-valued-at-628-bil> (accessed May 14, 2022).

Zimmt R., Kanner, Maas O. I. and Avidan T. (2017), “China-Iran Relations Following the Nuclear Agreement and the Lifted Sanctions: Partnership Inc”, *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 20, Issue 2, pp. 45–56, available at: <https://strategicassessment.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/antq/fe-148324862.pdf> (accessed October 20, 2022).

*М. М. Фаларті, В. Абдоллахпур*

**Китайсько-іранські відносини в тіні США:**

**часткова співпраця і часткова відстороненість (від 1979 р. до сьогодні)**

Ісламська Республіка Іран продовжує підтримувати глибокі економічні і політичні відносини з Китайською Народною Республікою. Починаючи з 1970-х рр., Китай не тільки налагодив дипломатичні й економічні відносини зі США, а й став їхнім найбільшим торговим партнером. Маючи дипломатичні відносини як із Вашингтоном, так і з Тегераном, а також будучи постійним членом Ради Безпеки ООН, уряд Китаю відкрито відіграв конструктивну роль, із власною метою і намірами, у спробах знову посадити Іран і США за стіл переговорів (як у випадку ядерних переговорів, або Спільного всеосяжного плану дій, у 2015 р.). Ядерна угода 2015 року була особливо важливою, оскільки вона потенційно надавала як Ірану, так і США дипломатичну можливість і платформу для деескалації їхніх розбіжностей, напруженості й ворожнечі. Угода також мала на меті скасування більшості санкцій і бар'єрів у відкритому веденні бізнесу з Іраном і, отже, відкриття прибуткового іранського ринку для Китаю, поміж інших міжнародних гравців. Отже, ми стали свідками тристоронніх відносин між цими трьома країнами, які вплинули на їхні політичні, економічні та дипломатичні амбіції. У пропонованій статті досліджується фактор США у відносинах Китаю та Ірану, щоб висвітлити подвійну політику Китаю щодо Вашингтона і Тегерана. Ми дійшли висновку, що фактор США змушує китайську сторону дотримуватися подвійної політики щодо Ірану, яка обертається навколо часткової співпраці і часткової відстороненості. Водночас Пекін демонструє тенденцію до зближення з Тегераном, щоб надіслати сигнал Вашингтону, що Китай не толеруватиме односторонні дії.

**Ключові слова:** Іран; Китай; США; співпраця; китайсько-американські відносини; китайсько-іранські відносини

*Стаття надійшла до редакції 13.04.2023*